

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture or ill-treatment/ Incommunicado detention

26 August 2005

IRAN

Taher Mahmoud Tamimi (m), aged 43
Mohammad Jalali (m), aged 33
Name unknown (m), aged 40
and at least 36 others

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those named above and at least 37 others who are all members of Iran's Arab minority. They may be held in incommunicado detention and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Taher Mahmoud Tamimi, his wife, Seham and two young children aged 6 and 18 months were reportedly arrested on 8 August in the city of Khoy, on the Iranian border with Turkey. Two days later, Seham and the children were released. It is not known exactly where Taher Mahmoud Tamimi is being held though he may be in incommunicado detention in a prison in the city of Ahvaz. On 12 August, the family home in Ahvaz was raided by the members of the security forces, who confiscated a computer and some foreign currency.

An unnamed 40 year old was arrested on 13 August at Mahattat Ghattar train station in Ahvaz, by members of the security forces in plain clothes. No reasons were given for his arrest and he is believed to be held in Golestan, the new intelligence headquarters in the Ahvaz region. Mohammad Jalali was reportedly arrested on 20 August in Ahvaz by members of the security forces. His family has not been informed of his whereabouts and are concerned for his safety.

The arrests took place after earlier protests in the Khuzestan province following reports of an alleged government plan to disperse the country's Arab population or to force them to relinquish their Arab identity. They also followed four bomb blasts in the city of Ahvaz and two others in Tehran in which at least nine people were killed and at least 90 others were injured on 12 June.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Arab community in Iran makes up around 3% of the total population, with Persians apparently making up around 50%. The Arab community mainly lives in the Khuzestan region, which borders Iraq. It is strategically important because it is the site of much of Iran's oil reserves. The Arab population do not feel they have benefited as much from the oil revenue as the Persian population; historically they have been marginalised and discriminated against, for instance being denied the right to an education in their own language

The unrest in the Khuzestan province reportedly began on 15 April 2005 in the Shalang Abad (also known as Da'ira) area of central Ahvaz. Around 1,000 demonstrators reportedly assembled to protest at the contents of a letter, reports of which began to circulate on 9 April, allegedly written in 1999 by an advisor in the office of President Khatami. The letter sets out policies for the reduction of the Arab population of the province of Khuzestan, which include resettling Arabs in other regions of Iran, resettling non-Arabs in the province, and replacing Arabic place names with Persian ones. Government sources, including the letter's supposed author, have strongly denied that it is genuine. The text, with an English translation, can be found at <http://www.ahwaz.org.uk/images/ahwaz-khuzestan.pdf>; the supposed author's denial that he wrote the letter, along with an explanation of the contents, can be found (in Persian) at <http://www.webneveshteha.com/>. The government has reportedly begun a limited enquiry into the unrest, as has the parliament, but these do not appear to be sufficiently wide-ranging or impartial.

On 14 August, the Iranian government reportedly accused the United Kingdom and the United States of instigating the recent ethnic clashes involving the Arab and Kurdish minorities in the country. Furthermore,

the Ministry of Intelligence also reportedly announced that those responsible for the unrest and bombing in Khuzestan province in April and June have been identified and arrested.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, Persian or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Taher Mahmoud Tamimi, Mohammad Jalali, an unnamed 40 year old male and at least 36 others who may be held in incommunicado detention and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment;
- calling on the authorities to release them immediately, unless they are promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling for them to be given immediate access to lawyers, their family, interpreters and medical treatment if necessary;
- seeking assurances that they are not being tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- reminding the authorities that confessions extracted under duress are prohibited by Article 38 of the constitution of Iran, which says that "All forms of torture for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information are forbidden," and that Iran is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), of which Article 7 states that "No one shall be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment."

APPEALS TO: (Fax numbers and e-mail addresses for Iran are unreliable so please send letters if you cannot get through)

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Presidency
Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 649 5880 (please mark 'For the attention of the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei')

Email: info@wilayah.org

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice
Park-e Shahr
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: irjpr@iranjudiciary.org (mark 'Please forward to His Excellency Ayatollah Shahroudi')

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Speaker of Parliament

Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami (Parliament)
Imam Khomeini Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 21 646 1746

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 October 2005.